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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS CHAT

Monday, December 26, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WINTER READING PLANS." Information from the Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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How many of you received books among their Christmas gifts? Or magazine subscriptions? Two of the nicest of all Christmas remembrances, I always think, because reading can be shared all through the year.

Perhaps some of you, not so fortunate as to be book-recipients, belong to a reading club, or have thought of starting one. Home demonstration clubs in many states have reading projects, and if I tell you about some of them today, you may glean an idea or two for your own community. Many of the reading programs owe their origin to the emphasis on "Constructive use of leisure" which grew out of better home management practices and short cuts in getting the household work done. Farm women in all sections enjoy reading but at some seasons do not have time for it. Winter offers the best opportunity to get in a little reading. The problem is usually where to get the books one would like to read, especially if there is no convenient library and buying a number of books is out of the question.

The help of a good county or state librarian in choosing a reading list is valuable when a book club is formed. A librarian can suggest subjects which make enjoyable reading and broaden the outlook of the readers. For instance, in one Michigan county, in response to a demand for a home demonstration course in appreciating and interpreting modern literature, there was a change from 95 percent reading nothing but light fiction, to 70 percent still chiefly interested in pastime reading, and the other 30 percent choosing books on biography, travel, social and economic problems, philosophy of life, humor, religion, short stories, history, drama, and poetry. The women in two of the centers were interested in group discussions on such subjects as how to get the most out of what we read, how to give a book review, how to tell well-written books from poor ones, short stories, and poetry.

Exchanging books or magazines around a circle of club members is the common way of making wider reading possible without great expense. For example, each member of a book club of 12 buys one book and has an opportunity to read those furnished by the other 11. Twelve is a good number for a book club, since one book a month is a fair average amount of reading for most busy housewives.

More ambitious clubs, especially those located near a lending library, may start out with a list of desirable books to be read at home and reviewed in club meetings. In some states a definite slant is given to the book project in a home demonstration club. Home economics reading was chosen for one California county club in 1937. College and high school teachers and the county librarian helped the home demonstration agent to select a good list of books and place them in the county library. Books on baby care were widely distributed in a Georgia county reading project. In Illinois, "Read more about your hobby", and "Make reading your hobby" were two suggestions at the Hobby Show at Champaign.

Increased reading in some states takes its impetus from the natural desire of people to know more about the state they live in. Kentucky women liked a reading project called "Know Kentucky", that called attention to state historical spots, towns and parks of note, and other special information about their state. From this beginning the club branched out into "Knowing America through Books", a topic of immense possibilities. Contributing to this end, one might mention in passing that several of the W.P.A. local histories are now available and to be found in libraries.

In Chesterfield County, Virginia, not only the history of the county and state forms a nucleus for reading. Each club agrees to establish a magazine exchange, and to buy a book on either homemaking or parliamentary law. The clubs in this county report programs requiring reading on "Facts about Virginia", "Current Events", "Mothers of the Bible", "Citizenship", "Rocking Chair Trips to Bermuda", and so on.

Montana women have two reading projects: Reading for Fun and Information, and Reading for Home Atmosphere. Interest is stimulated in these programs by having a quotation meeting, showing good pictures from books, reading parts aloud, and suggesting suitable children's reading. Several states report that mothers are very anxious to know about suitable children's books. Travel books and biographies interest rural homemakers in Fairfield County, Connecticut, where the home demonstration club members got up their own book club because the local library did not always have the newer books and was not open at hours convenient for all.

Most of the book clubs have individual members present book reviews at meetings. These are valuable for encouraging the expression of individual views. Reading aloud at home and establishing a good reading center in the home are suggested as measures for assuring more reading. In one state the modest goal of 3 books read in the course of a year contrasts with a negro 4-H club which has circulated its 412 books over 9,000 times, with 25 to 43 books read by each club member.

You may be interested in the titles of some of the books rural women say they have enjoyed. The librarians in any district could formulate a more rounded list, of course. Indiana women report reviews on Faith Baldwin's American Family; Pearl Buck's Good Earth; C. Wells, A Croquet Player. Kentucky women cite The Great American Bandwagon. New Hampshire women liked Show Boat, If This Be I, North to the Orient, Bright Mexico, Mr. Pete & Co. Washington State club members mention Spring Came on Forever, Call of the Canyon,. How to Live on 24 Hours a Day, My Great, Wide, Beautiful World, Gone with the Wind, Alice Adams, Vagabond Journey Round the World, Song of the Lark, Girl of the Limberlost. One West Virginia Club is proud of owning 3 sets of an encyclopedia for members' use.

The general feeling about wider book circulation is summed up by Mrs. John Roe, of Kent County, Delaware. She says: "After a morning or a whole day spent with prosaic pots and pans, broom and dust-rag, what could be better recreation than to settle oneself in a comfortable chair, and travel on Richard Halliburton's magic carpet across the seven seas and enjoy the beauty and strange customs of foreign lands; or to go pioneering with Grandmother Brown or Old Jules." When things are dull and humdrum, why not forget them all in Gone with the Wind, only it is advisable to lock that up at night and give your husband the key to keep until the next night, or he may not get any meals!"

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